

Delving into International Students' Attitudes to NESTs and NNESTs

SUREEPONG PHOTHONGSUNAN

*Theodore Maria School of Arts, Assumption University, Thailand
sureepongp@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

This study examined the attitudes of international students at university level towards native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) in a Thai context. It also explored how the attitudes held towards these two groups of teachers shaped the participants' learning practices and motivation to learn English. Two research instruments; the open-ended questionnaire and the semi-structured interview were employed for this study. The questionnaire administered with 31 participants was the primary data collection tool. The subsequent interview conducted with 14 of the participants served as a supplementary data. The findings indicated significantly differing attitudes towards native English-speaking teachers and non-native English speaking teachers in many areas. These domains comprised the teaching methods and styles; the understanding of students' problems; grading and marking; language proficiency; personality, classroom behaviour and discipline; and the ability to communicate and interact with learners. Some differences were also reported in the way they assigned work and arranged learning activities and their attitudes towards students. Most participants given the choice had a strong favour to study with native English-speaking teachers. There appeared to be a strong positive rapport between studying with native English speaking teachers and the participants' learning behaviours and eagerness to study English. Implications are made regarding teacher training, particularly for non-native English teachers and language teachers, be it native or non-native, having EFL teaching experience.

Keywords: Attitudes; Native English Speaking Teachers; Non-Native English Speaking Teachers; Learning Behaviours; Motivation

INTRODUCTION

Studies of students' attitudes towards second language acquisition have received considerable attention over the past few decades. Gardner and Lambert (1972) state that attitudes are usually connected with language achievement irrespective of aptitude and intelligence, justifying that attitudes are a stable feature that influences and determines one's progress in acquiring a foreign language. Students' attitudes to learning a foreign language are also linked to motivation to learn to speak a second language, predisposed by two types of attitudes (Cooper & Fishman 1977). The first type is 'integrative', which refers to a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture of the other group of people. The second is attitudes towards the language learning situation as a whole, including the teacher and the course itself (Spolsky 1989). Thus, these attitudes or perceptions related to second/foreign language learning experience would consecutively impact learners' behaviours and their ways of learning the language (Sevy-Biloon 2017).

English teachers teaching at university level in Thailand represent non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) from various nationalities, not only Thai. Nevertheless, Thai English teachers are the majority of the university teachers of English in this study context. There are two main research questions in the study:

1. What are the attitudes of international students towards native English-speaking teachers and non-native English speaking teachers?
2. How do these attitudes affect the students' learning behaviours and motivation in learning English?

It is important to mention that this study by no means endeavours to direct the investigation towards a question of 'who are better English teachers?'

LITERATURE REVIEW

Attitudes are a psychological construct, a mental and emotional entity that inheres in, or characterizes a person. Kulekci (2009) however, points out that social and collective occurrences entrenched in social actions; in which people are involved in numerous daily situations and settings, are crucial in forming an individual's attitudes. Interestingly, according to Harmer (1991), on the whole, the emphasis of collective learning is on people who have acquired knowledge and ability and those who are looking for such knowledge or cultivating such ability. This is in line with the language teaching and learning condition. The knowledgeable contributor is the teacher who is the experienced foreign language educator, and the ones searching for and developing knowledge are the students wishing to grow into capable foreign language users.

For the reason that this current study centres on attitudes of students in a certain context, its holistic learning ambiance is definite to be dissimilar to another learning environment. To begin with, there are influences of the educational institution on students. The educational institution can influence language learning in various ways. It can have a bearing on how the students learn through its organisational milieus, circumstances, as well as cultures (Breen 2001). It can also influence the activity of learning through the tacit rules within the professional-academic culture for teacher and student behaviour (Holliday 1994).

In addition, there exist wider political, social and cultural issues that might impinge on language learners' ways of learning and behaving in their context of learning. Coleman (1996), for instance, finds rather distinctive classroom features of English lessons in a university in Indonesia. Without showing disrespect to their teachers, the learners seem to engage in all kinds of activities, with the exception of 'learning'. Coleman (*ibid.*) suggests that perhaps certain features of the classroom phenomena could be linked to other aspects of the Indonesian culture, which are beyond education. He reasons that university English lessons can be interpreted as ritual functions which are in agreement with certain social events in the country.

Holliday (1994) asserts that what goes on within the classroom is not only influenced by social factors within the wider educational institution but also by social, wider educational, political and economic factors that exist in a society. These factors also seem to reflect the extent to which learning occurs or does not occur in the language classroom. In this respect, the overall context of learning is seen to have a bearing on students' attitudes, behaviours and motivation in learning a second language.

DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF ATTITUDES

Baron and Byrne (1984, p. 126 cited in Underwood 2000) provide a definition of an attitude as 'a relatively lasting cluster of feelings, beliefs, and behaviour tendencies directed towards specific persons, ideas, objects, or groups'. It is generally accepted that an attitude cannot be

directly observed, but we can ask people about their attitudes or infer them from their performances.

Correspondingly, Ajzen (2001) and many other social psychologists accept that an attitude is an interrelated, intricate and multidimensional construct, comprising three aspects. These three aspects encompass: an emotional or affective aspect, which comprises positive or negative feelings about the object in question; a cognitive aspect, which represents a belief or ideas about it; and a behavioural or conative aspect, which is a tendency to behave in a particular way towards it.

In sum, the study of attitudes is central in social psychology because attitudes influence behaviour, information processing and social encounters (Bohner & Wänke 2002). The prominence of attitudes becomes apparent at various levels of analysis: individual, interpersonal, and societal. At the individual level, attitudes influence thinking, perception, other attitudes and behaviour. They form part of a person's self concept. At the interpersonal level, our own thought and behaviour may be shaped by other people's attitudes and vice versa. At the societal level, attitudes towards one's own groups and other groups are at the heart of intra/intergroup cooperation and conflict (Bohner & Wänke *ibid*).

ATTITUDE CHANGE

Potter and Wetherell (1987) claim that attitudes are not enduring entity as it can change over time. However, Scholl (2002) argues that attitudes cannot be changed simply by education. They, in fact, are often remarkably resistant to change. A change in attitudes depends on who is presenting knowledge, how it is presented, how the person is perceived, the credibility of the communicator, and the conditions by which knowledge was received.

The present study takes into account the issue of attitude change as it would then be possible to argue that the participants under study might not hold the same attitudes towards the areas under investigation as they progress through life. They at some point could change their attitudes to be congruent with their cognition, affect, and behaviour at that stage, although most of these individuals may try to maintain consistency among their various attitude constituents (Triandis 1971). It is also feasible that old attitudes, which may be stored in memory, are either not accessible or not appropriate. Thus, new attitudes may be constructed to replace them. In this case, despite the construction of new attitudes, previous attitudes may not be overwritten (Wilson et al. 2000).

LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Attitudes may be a significant predictor of performance, competence and learning potential in learning a language (MacIntyre & Charos 1996, House & Keely 1996) as well as in learning a second language (Gardner 1985). Attitudes play a critical role in second language learning in that they determine second language learners' learning behavior and motivation (Cotteral 1995). Learners will be more likely to make contact with the speakers of the language if they have positive attitudes towards those speakers (Lightbown & Spada 1999). Stern (1983) reasoned that if learners highly value the target language, they are likely to assimilate themselves into that language and learn it well. On the contrary, they tend to reject learning that language if they take a negative view of it.

However, there are many other factors that reflect different kinds as well as degrees of the relationship between learners' attitudes towards L2 learning and language achievement and motivation (Dörnyei 2003). Students' gender, age, upbringing, L2 teachers, learning contexts, peers, family members, time spent for study, L2 community, L2 culture, L2 speakers and even students' own self-esteem and confidence are some of the influencing

factors. Of particular relevance to the present study is the L2 teacher. Some empirical research by Gardner and his colleagues has demonstrated that students' positive attitudes toward their L2 teacher are generally linked to motivation and achievement in the classroom (Gardner 1985).

This present study directs its particular focus to one of the most significant factors that could influence L2 learners' attitudes towards L2 learning: L2 teachers (Noels 2003). In order to better understand the roles of teachers in L2 learning, the next section will examine how learners' attitudes towards L2 teachers can affect their L2 learning.

L2 LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS L2 TEACHERS

Many studies have been undertaken to explore the attitudes of L2 learners towards L2 teachers, and the impact of L2 teachers on L2 learners. Clément et al. (1994) discovered that students' evaluations of their teachers' relationship with the class were related to their linguistic capacity, self-confidence and tension. Also, some L2 educators have come up with hypotheses regarding certain aspects of the teacher's way of communication that influences students' motivational degrees and behaviors. For example, Dörnyei (1994) points out that teachers' affiliative force, authority means and manner of delivering tasks and giving feedback are in relation to students' motivation and language learning behaviour.

Prasertsuk (1990) carried out a study to explore the factors that affected Thai and non-Thai students' motivation in learning English in four faculties at a Thai university. It was found that out of the 684 student sampled, the factor that had the greatest impact on students' learning motivation was teachers' expertise and accuracy in the subject matter. Specifically, the most significant factor influencing their motivation in learning was teachers' effective pedagogical methods.

Owing to this, L2 teachers seem to have a very important role in the L2 learning mechanism, predominantly in the context of the present study, Thailand, where the vast majority of learners have been taught using a rote learning method (McNamara 2000). In such a learning context, teachers are considered almost exclusive providers of knowledge, while students generally learn only what teachers expect. The coverage is also only what is anticipated for assessment, and this too is determined for the most part by teachers.

Among L2 teachers in an ESL or EFL context, according to Medgyes (1996), two major groups of teachers can be classified: native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs). This implies that every language teacher is either a NEST or a non-NEST. This view is pertinent to a number of research studies and literature, which normally label ESL teachers on the basis of their native and non-native status (e.g. Davies 2003, Braine 1999, McLaughlin 2000).

PAST RESEARCH ON ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS TOWARDS NESTS AND NNESTS

There is a wealth of research studies done on attitudes of students towards NESTs and NNESTs undertaken in diverse settings. Thomas (1995) carried out a research survey in Slovakia with 98 students. The survey was aimed at investigating the students' attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs against certain standards. A questionnaire with a rating scale was used as the only data gathering technique. The findings from the survey indicated differences between NESTs and NNESTs in several aspects such as teaching methods and classroom behavior. There were also areas where both groups of English teachers got a positive rating, including teachers' listening to students and general regard of students for their teachers' ability.

Shimizu (1995) undertook a research survey of learners' attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs in Japan where 1,088 Japanese students from eight colleges participated. The main goals were to investigate whether there were any differences in Japanese students' attitudes towards Japanese English teachers and NESTs and to report on qualities and attributes students felt were important in English teachers. A close-ended questionnaire with 16 questions was used. In the findings, over half the students felt that English classes taught by NESTs were interesting, humorous, and energetic while those taught by Japanese teachers were gloomy, boring, strict and at times tedious. In sum, the results of the survey strongly suggest that Japanese English teachers and NESTs are perceived differently. Japanese teachers appear to be valued more for academic skills such as intelligence and knowledge, whereas NESTs are of higher value for personal characteristics such as friendliness.

Research studies were also conducted to investigate learners' attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs. Amin (1994) found that students who learn English, either as a medium of instruction or as a main subject, anticipate their teacher to use what they perceive to be a standard dialect associated with native speakers of English, but they are not certain about what this standard dialect is.

In line with this, Amin (1997), Thomas (1999) and Braine (1999) reported challenges to the integrity of NNESTs just because they were not perceived by their students as NESTs. However, Braine (1999) and Thomas (1999) discovered that although students will initially perceive NESTs as perfect models in language learning, as they become better acquainted with qualified, competent NNESTs, students often enjoy learning in their classes, knowing that NNESTs better understand their language problems and needs.

METHODOLOGY

The present study employed a case study approach. Cohen et al. (2000) describe a case study as a study of a specific instance with a bounded system, providing a unique example of real people in real situations. Case studies can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis.

As a research strategy and an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context, the case study could satisfy the needs to explore where data would be extracted from people's experiences and so are perceived to be rich in reality. Moreover, not only can case studies provide a data source where further analysis can be made, but they also can lead to further research work (Cohen & Manion 1995).

SAMPLING

The sampling strategy used was a non-probability sample, deriving from the research targeting a particular group in the knowledge that it does not statistically represent the wider population, but rather itself (Cohen et al. 2000). To be specific, the sampling strategy followed the purposive sampling technique.

The sample consisted of 31 non-Thai participants from 6 different countries who majored in Business English, an international curriculum, where English was used as a medium of instruction. By and large, the selection of participants was based on a number of credits earned. A minimum of 90 credits earned by the participants out of 142 credits required for graduation was a requisite to ensure that the participants had experienced learning with a diversity of teachers and could reflect on their attitudes towards their teachers more concretely.

The following table shows the background of the participants taking part in this study.

TABLE 1. Summary of participants' background

Background		Number of participants (total 31)
Gender	Male	15
	Female	16
Age	20-23	22
	24-26	9
Current Grade Point Average (G.P.A.) out of 4.00 scale	2.00-2.50	20
	2.51-3.00	8
	3.01-3.50	3
Nationalities	Chinese	14
	Korea	7
	Japan	6
	Timorese	2
	Burmese	2
Time spent at university	3-4 years	22
	5-6 years	8
	7-8 years	1
Time spent learning English	15-21 years	31
Study experience in English speaking countries	Yes	7
	No	24
Perceived percentage of time studying with NESTs since commencing university studies (out of 100%)	0-25%	17
	26-50%	11
	51-75%	1
	76-100%	2
Perceived percentage of time studying with NNESTs since commencing university studies (out of 100%)	0-25%	7
	26-50%	14
	51-75%	6
	76-100%	4

DATA COLLECTION

To obtain thorough and comprehensive data, two data collection methods were employed: open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

The main supply of data in this mixed-method study was derived from the use of open-ended questionnaires. Cohen et al. (2000, p. 255) state that an open-ended response 'puts the responsibility for and ownership of the data much more firmly into respondents' hands. Moreover, it is an open-ended questionnaire that 'can catch the authenticity, richness, depth of response, honesty and candour, which are the hallmarks of qualitative data' (ibid.). FitzGerald (1996) mentions one of the great advantages of the open-ended question—that is, it can discover uncommon but intelligent opinions of which the researcher would otherwise have remained unaware. Considering these strengths, the use of an open-ended questionnaire was taken into account. The results from the pilot study confirmed that using all open-ended questions allowed responses to flourish and presented no difficulty at all to the pilot respondents. Therefore, open-ended items in the questionnaire were used with the hope of gaining an in-depth insight into the students' attitudes as far as possible.

In addition to serving as triangulation, interviews were used as a supplementary source to the open-ended questionnaires, for they provided thorough qualitative data, which could then be analysed using interpretive techniques. Thus, interviews used in the study can be a potentially powerful means of interpreting and extracting information from the respondents who could offer insights into issues or problems that were not overt before.

In the study, a semi-structured interview method was used. This would allow the respondents to express their feelings and thoughts and be guided and focused simultaneously (Mills, 2001).

DATA ANALYSIS

As only qualitative data was gathered, it was analysed using an interpretive approach. The interpretive analysis methods of ‘topic ordering’ and ‘constructing categories’ guided by Radnor (2002) were applied.

Concerning the analysis of the semi-structured interviews, the 14 interviews were completely transcribed. The interview data was in fact used to supplement the students’ attitudes rendered in the questionnaire. Member checking was used to increase the credibility of the interview data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To address the first research question, five key categories were created. These encompass who NESTs are; perceived differences between NESTs and NNESTs; teachers’ experience; teachers’ qualifications; and option to study with either NESTs or NNESTs. It should be noted that the data obtained from the 31 participants showed rather similar findings regardless of their different nationalities.

When asked who NESTS would be, most of the participants recognised, as Kachru (1998) argues, NESTs to originate from inner-circle nations (i.e. England, America, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada), where English functions as a first language.

With regard to perceived differences between NESTs and NNESTs, the subsequent categories emerged as follows:

Teaching methods and styles of NESTs and NNESTs

More than half of the participants pointed out that NNESTs employed teaching methods and styles that focused primarily on theory, drill and memorisation, while NESTs related their methods and styles of teaching more heavily to practice, classroom discussion and activities using real-life examples. Also, several participants added that NNESTs, unlike NESTs, placed particular emphasis on grammar and writing and on in-depth understanding in the area being taught rather than oral and conversational skill development.

Understanding students’ problems

The vast majority of the respondents (n=23) reported that NNESTs understood non-native English students’ background, culture and problems as they themselves shared these features with the students. A few, however, argued that some NNESTs were not easily approachable and tended to be socially disoriented particularly when engaging in conversation in English, making them turn to NESTs for help.

Grading and marking

Grading and marking were perceived as one combined element by almost all respondents. More than half (n=20) felt that there was a difference between NESTs and NNESTs in terms of grading and marking in various aspects. Out of 20, 11 felt that NNESTs mainly used grammar and prescribed content as criteria for marking and grading whereas NESTs would put more emphasis on understanding and overall content. There were five respondents in support of a belief that NNESTs were more flexible and generous when marking and grading because NNESTs knew well what non-native English students were like.

Teachers' language proficiency

Out of 31 participants, 26 of them felt that NESTs were better language users given that they are native speakers of English with innate understanding of the language.

The importance of NNESTs' speaking and writing English like NESTs

It was found that the majority of them, 23 participants, believed that NNESTs should attempt at their best to speak or write like NESTs since they served as role models for students. Eight respondents held a different view, arguing that what was important was not the ability to speak or write like NESTs, but the ability to get an intended spoken and/or written message across to learners effectively.

Personality, classroom behaviour and discipline

The findings indicated that 25 respondents saw differences in personality, classroom behaviour and discipline of NESTs and NNESTs. Most participants appeared to perceive classroom behaviour and discipline, and personality as two separate but related elements. The respondents (n=25) reported that in general NESTs were less strict than NNESTs concerning classroom behaviour and discipline. Five participants additionally commented that culture had a great effect on the personalities, classroom behaviour and discipline of both international students and teachers. Coming from different countries and backgrounds, they seemed to be culturally influenced to compose and behave themselves in certain ways.

Assigning work to students and arranging learning activities in class

According to 15 respondents, there was a difference between NESTs and NNESTs in giving students assignments and arranging classroom activities. Five respondents pointed out that NESTs assigned less homework and that most work came as reports or projects, which required students to work either on a group or individual basis for some time.

Teachers' ability to communicate and interact with students

The results indicated that 21 participants believed that there was a difference between NESTs and NNESTs in relation to their ability to communicate and interact with learners. Out of 21, seven respondents argued that NNESTs tended to keep some distance from students. This created some gap between students and NNESTs as both parties seemed to avoid being too involved with one another. Nevertheless, six participants experienced the strength of some NNESTs in this area because of the fact that some NNESTs share similar background and culture with students, which could help them better communicate or interact with international students.

Teachers' attitudes towards teaching and students

About half of the participants noticed the disparity between NESTs and NNESTs in their attitudes towards teaching and towards students. They reasoned that NNESTs had more positive attitudes towards a teaching job and towards students. They all felt that NNESTs saw that teaching was a tenable job out of which they could make a living, while many NESTs could think that they were just persons hired to impart or share knowledge with learners.

Option to study with NESTs or NNESTs

Also, the participants were asked about their preference to study with NESTs or NNESTs. The findings indicated that 25 participants would choose to study with NESTs, justifying that studying with NESTs could help to better improve their overall English proficiency with a possibility of improving English pronunciation in particular.

Perceived differences between NESTs and NNESTs

It would appear that the perceived differences between NESTs and NNESTs as acknowledged by the participants in the study mostly correspond with what Medgyes (2001) holds. According to him, native and non-native English teachers differ in terms of their language proficiency and teaching behaviour. He further remarks that the discrepancy in language proficiency accounts for most of the differences in teaching behaviour of these two groups of English teachers. In this way, as Medgyes notes, different teaching behaviour would take into account different teaching methods and styles, personality, classroom behaviour and discipline, ability to communicate and interact with learners, and ways of assigning work and arranging classroom activities. In addition, Palfreyman (1993) discusses the different focuses placed between NESTs and NNESTs when teaching English as it seems that NNESTs put more emphasis on rigid language form and meaning probably as a result of their L2 learning and translation to and from their L1, rather than flexible forms and meanings like NESTs. This can be said to generally reflect what the present study found regarding their teaching approaches; that is, NNESTs tended to highlight memorization, drill and theory, while NESTs would emphasise more intelligibility, development of ideas, and lively discussion mostly through activities. Thomas (1995) also noted this tendency, which is possibly explained by discrepancies in language ability. Moreover, in terms of personality, classroom behaviour and discipline, Thomas's study and the present study found very similar results: NESTs were perceived as behaving more informally in class, and it is quite clear that this was seen as a positive attribute.

For the second research question, it can be answered as follows:

Attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs and students' learning behaviour

Evidence from the responses to the questionnaires and the interviews revealed that a large number of participants perceived that studying with NESTs or NNESTs influenced their behaviour and/or feeling in class. Many reported being more relaxed in NESTs' classrooms, whereas others perceived themselves to be more excited and attentive, mainly because of communication difficulties between them and NESTs. However, despite the presence of a language barrier, the vast majority of participants held positive impressions of classes taught by NESTs given their own learning behaviours. They, however, did not view classes conducted by NNESTs as having any unpleasant impact in this respect. Shimizu (1995)'s survey indicated similar results, but most students in her study explicitly showed a negative impression of classes taught by NNESTs in comparison with those of NESTs.

There appeared to be a positive relationship between the students' attitudes towards NESTs and their learning behaviour in terms of participation in classroom discussion. Most of the students perceived that NESTs encouraged them more to share ideas in class, making them eager to engage themselves in discussion. Kato (1998) found the same result, as NESTs in her study were seen to encourage students to participate and contribute to the class more than their non-native counterparts. Schütz (2004) emphasises the importance of teachers in motivating and challenging students to participate in discussion, and regards this as one of the desirable attributes of a good ESL teacher. In this regard, as many students in this study remarked, NNESTs seemed less able to do this than NESTs.

Attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs and motivation to learn English

In general, most students in the study indicated a positive drive to study English with NESTs. As the data showed, their motivation to learn English was, to a great extent, associated with the value placed on English listening and speaking improvement. It might be the case that for students in this study listening and speaking were considered more practical and desirable

than reading and writing. Rivers (1981) reveals that outside the English classroom, listening and speaking are used twice as much as reading and writing. Also, inside the classroom, speaking and listening are the most often used skills (Brown, 1994).

In summary, with regard to students' motivation to learn English, the majority felt that studying English with NESTs somehow motivated them to learn English although different reasons were given. Discussions relevant to these reasons were also considered. It is surprising that no participant in this study reported being specifically motivated to study English with NNESTs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

The findings of this study suggested that EFL students under study perceived several differences between NESTs and NNESTs. Overall, they reported holding positive attitudes towards NESTs. Also, there appeared to be a relationship between these attitudes towards NESTs and their learning behaviours and motivation in learning English. Though not perceived very negatively and in most cases not being questioned on their scholarly skills, NNESTs were basically found to be less preferred and at times inferior to NESTs, particularly in the domain of oral and aural production.

The immediate implications that arise out of the findings seem to directly concern NNESTs rather than NESTs who were already favoured, as the results indicated. In this case one question immediately arises for NNESTs. Should they implement any action in order to satisfy the needs and expectations of the students in this study although the sample size is quite small? Considering the current need in Thailand for EFL learning which promotes communicative, learner-centred approaches to language teaching (Bunang 2012), the answer seems to be 'yes'. Long (1997) states that becoming aware of how students feel about their educational experience is useful in many ways and as important as what is actually being taught. Thus, eliciting information from the students and catering to their needs should not always be regarded as pandering to students' desires (Christison & Krahnke 1986). Rather, to make the changes that students see as relevant and beneficial for their own L2 learning on the condition that those changes are ethical and achievable would motivate them to learn even better.

There are certain implications for NNESTs that can be drawn from the findings. These might also be of relevance to NNESTs working in other EFL or Asian contexts. Where applicable, implications relevant to NESTs are also suggested.

Pronunciation

It would be helpful to equip NNESTs with training at the early stage with regard to English pronunciation. As reported in this study, the students accentuated NNESTs' good English pronunciation. With teacher training, more precise English pronunciation can be achieved. It would be very difficult to change one's 'foreign accent', especially after the age of six (Blumer, 2002) as accents are entrenched and hardly change when a person becomes older. Yet, it is always desirable to improve and change one's 'pronunciation' particularly given the students' opinions.

Classroom engagement

The second implication concerns NNESTs' teacher training in terms of encouraging students to share ideas and giving them opportunities to be involved in classroom discussion. However, cultural factors and limited language proficiency might present a hurdle. With sufficient teacher training, it seems that the cultural influence could be minimised, giving confidence to

NNESTs to use a more participative teaching style. Research evidence shows that students appear to have a real appreciation for teachers who are good story tellers, especially those who share real-life anecdotes that are interesting to them (Hadley & Hadley 1996). Thus, through choosing appropriate lesson activities and using proper non-verbal communication to help convey meaningful expressions, NNESTs are likely to generate more classroom dynamics while having less to worry about their English language use. NESTs may also find this second implication useful to some extent for their classroom practice.

Building confidence

The need for NNESTs to build up confidence in learners could be another implication. As Saito (2003) suggests, one way to do this is for NNESTs to share their strong merits or qualifications at the outset of the class, stressing that they have enough language and cultural knowledge of their own and of English. Saito found that utilising such a strategy had positive results as her students came to know her better, trust her qualifications, and regard her as a role model for successful English learners. In addition, NNESTs need to be confident in themselves as language teachers. Reves and Medgyes (1994) assert that NNESTs must be made more aware of their own advantageous potential as language teachers in comparison with NESTs because even NESTs acknowledge NNESTs' strengths in many different areas. They should also consider several positive facts to gain confidence in language teaching.

Cultural influence and awareness

Many participants indicated that their attitudes towards teachers and their classroom behaviours were influenced by their own culture. This cultural influence appeared to be implicit within the learning context. Thus, the next implication takes into account the explicit teaching of culture. Both NESTs and NNESTs and even learners should be made aware that language and culture are inexorably linked and as such cannot be separated (Byram & Fleming 1998, Baker 2003). Thus, the teaching of culture should be integrated into normal English lessons. At present, there is a growing realisation of the importance of culture within English teaching in Asia and the need for teachers and learners to become aware of the complexity of culture. Learners need to be encouraged to use English in various contexts rather than with reference to only English speech communities or even their own native culture. Teaching content also needs to reflect this. Furthermore, teaching methodology itself needs to mediate between multi-national and Western educational values, particularly concerning communicative and learner-centred approaches to language teaching (Bunang 2002).

The influence of the wider social context

The overall findings of the study revealed that most students favoured NESTs regardless of the competence of NNESTs. It appears that they are similar to many students in other studies in that they reflect the general positive attitude at university towards NESTs. They might also be as biased as many people in the TESOL field, especially those who are in charge of schools and universities. As Moussu (2002) remarks, NNESTs do not represent a threat to students but it is school administrators who fear that a foreign accent of a NNEST is a sure sign of a bad teacher. Similarly, a study conducted by Phothongsunan and Suwanarak (2008) regarding Thai English teachers' perceptions of themselves and NESTs shows that NESTs are thought to represent power, success and authenticity in English language teaching in Thai society and are treated with favour in the Thai university context.

Taken this into account, it is possible that the social context plays a role in shaping the students' views. Students' attitudes can be influenced by values and perceptions within the

larger social context. The students are not barred from this reality, and are likely to be affected by it in forming their ideas.

CONCLUSION

What is suggested from the findings of this study is that the international students studying at a private university in Thailand perceived several differences between NESTs and NNESTs. Overall, they reported holding positive attitudes towards NESTs. Also, there appeared to be a relationship between these attitudes towards NESTs and their learning behaviours and motivation in learning English. When they were given a choice to study with either NESTs or NNESTs, the vast majority chose to study with NESTs, reasoning that studying with NESTs helped them to better improve their language proficiency especially pronunciation.

Also, some effects of studying with these two groups of English teachers were reported in the way they participated in classrooms, the way they asked questions in class and their learning performance. In particular, there appeared to be a strong positive relationship between the students' attitudes towards NESTs and their classroom participation. The role of culture was found to impinge on how the students behaved in the classroom.

In regards to motivation to study English, most students conceded that there was a positive impetus to learn English with NESTs. Listening and speaking improvement, the skill with which NESTs were thought to be able to help students effectively, was attributed as the main reason for the motivation. Considering students' learning behaviours and motivation to learn English, the results suggested that most students appeared to hold more positive impressions towards NESTs in comparison with NNESTs.

This study makes no endeavour to investigate who are better and more capable English teachers. Rather, it strongly puts forward effective collaboration between NESTs and NNESTs at work. By sharing their strengths and insights from their various linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds, both NESTs and NNESTs can benefit and grow professionally.

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